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YOU MUST FORGET

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They left Oak Ridge and drove home in one of the undertaker's cars. The day had been unusually warm for February and their feet had sunk into the softened turf at every step. Robert Cotter remembered stepping on the stones when he could and hoping there would be no rain tomorrow because Saturday was the only day in the week when Roy could play from morning until night without fear of being reminded of his school or lessons . . . "You know, Dad, I don't mind it raining as long as it doesn't do it on Saturday" . . . Yes, for the boy's sake he would pray that it would not rain even though Roy would not be able to play any more.

At home they had something to eat, hot tea and muffins and chocolate cake, and his relatives and friends were kinder to him than he had ever before known them to be. He did wish though that Helen were not so snappish, or her face so white and stony, for Roy would not have liked it a bit and would have reproved her in his quiet voice that made him seem so much older than he was: "Please, Mother, don't look that way; you're so pretty I can't believe it's really you . . . "

Yes, the boy had had sense, an uncommon lot of it, more perhaps than he or Helen would ever have. This morning when the men were putting up the chairs in the parlor he had said to her: "I think we've lost something very necessary to us, dear," and she had said "Yes," although he was quite certain that she did not know of what he was talking. The room bothered her; it somehow did not look just right, and she was directing the men to make changes. Helen was kind

and considerate and very clever about managing a home, but there were some things, delicate questions of feeling, that she often could not understand.

After refreshments they went to the parlor, which had been cleared of its chairs and the furniture restored, but there was still the penetrating fragrance of flowers which even the opened windows had failed to dispel. He lit the gas logs in the grate and turned to his brother-in-law, who was saying to him: "I hope you and Helen will see fit to go away for a few days. It's the best thing for both of you. I know what it is; I've been through it. You must forget."

He felt that his fresh cigaret was a momentary comfort, for he was conscious of the smoke burning his nostrils pleasantly as he expelled it through his nose. He wished he was now again on Oak Ridge and could hear the cawing of the crows as they wheeled and banked against the greying of the afternoon sky, the blackness of their bodies, the wildness of their cries. "Perhaps we will, Fred, perhaps we will. Roy was a smart kid, an awfully smart one, and he did get such a lot of pleasure in going away for a few days."

"Yes, he was." He was aware of Fred's hand on his shoulder, and of an instinctive desire to draw away. He wanted no sympathy, and least of all the kind that made him a spectacle before his friends. Always he had stood alone and he would continue to stand so; besides, most people's sympathy was morbid: they gave it in order to see you wince and suffer a little more. He hated it because he did not want them to make a fool of him.

At last he was aware of a strange tiredness in the small of his back, in the muscles of his legs, and he recalled the room whirling slowly about him, and then rising as though he were on an elevator. Somehow he reached his chair near the window and apologized to his friends: "I guess I'm more tired than I thought, not used to standing up so long at a stretch — you'll excuse me?" How queerly they had looked at him! He had not, had he, said something wrong? For Roy's sake he must be more careful in the future . . . Why couldn't he and Roy go away to Washington or Virginia for

a few days; a short trip, or Helen would be jealous and want lots more clothes or a sofa for the parlor because she wasn't taken along . . .

Helen had returned at last and he saw her talking to Alice. Her face was remarkably calm and free of lines, and she was still pretty with her brown hair and eyes. Roy was right in calling her so, but it was her reality that had troubled him, for after the boy was born Helen had seemed to merge her best qualities, the ones he most admired, in Roy; in fact, he was often tempted to believe that she had become another part of his son to him, if that were possible. Sometimes people believed in the most impossible things, perhaps because that was the only real compensation existence offered them.

Somehow his friends and relatives were finally gone, leaving the musk of perfume and cigar smoke and the memory of their voices, and he was alone with Helen. When she came and sat opposite him he did not want to talk but felt that he must; anything, anything at all would do. "I'm tired — did Alice speak to you of our going away?"

"No. She said she and Fred were going to Florida next week."

"I see. Next week's your birthday, isn't it?"

"Yes. I'll be thirty-five on Thursday." She looked out of the window, and he noted that there was more color in her cheeks than he had seen in a week. It was rouge, but he was glad she had put some on since it did away with the cold, stony look, made her face seem warmer.

"Thirty-five. Roy's birthday is next month and he'll be twelve."

She said after a silence: "You look very thin, Bob; it makes you older than you are."

"Forty isn't old." He spoke defensively.

"But it isn't young either."

For a time he stared at her and then heard himself saying: "It's too bad we can't go back and live our lives over again. Just think how differently we would do things, how we would treat people in the light of what we have learned, for knowl-

edge comes so slowly and in such infinitesimal quantities that most of its value is lost through the avarice of our ignorance. It takes an age — ”

“Tomorrow I’ve got to see Mrs. Smith about the new dress I’m having made. Roy was so fond of my blue one that I’m having her make another of the same material.”

Perhaps Fred’s suggestion was not a bad one. If he could get away from the office for a week or ten days they could go somewhere, to Cold Harbor or Beechwood Springs. Helen of course would not like the Springs because she couldn’t wear her best clothes, but then he was not going away for excitement. At Cold Harbor he could read and think, and take long walks by the ocean with the friendly gulls screaming at him, while at the Springs there was the forest now dark and bare with winter, and the comforting voice of the trees. Both places were excellent for what he wanted, but he must consider Helen —

“Bob, please answer me. You sit there and simply stare at nothing. Aren’t you — aren’t you all right?”

“Yes, I’m fine.” It was dark outside now, and he was glad that Helen had not switched on anything but the bridge-lamp beside her. “I suppose we shall have to eat soon. I wish we didn’t, for I’m not hungry.”

“You’ll feel better if you do. I know I will.”

He watched her leave the parlor. Helen was very practical and not by half so possessive about things as he. She was a good loser, one who always played the game no matter how badly things might go against her; and he remembered how brave she had been when shortly after their marriage his business had gotten into difficulties through too sudden expansion and had been threatened with bankruptcy. When he told her they might have to start over again she hadn’t stormed or made a scene. As a matter of fact she had said very little, save: “I know you’ll pull through, Bob, but if you don’t I’ll be with you just the same.” She had been splendid, and it had put a lot of heart in him. But it was his feeling about Roy which he could not understand, for a month ago he might have — but a month ago there were

seemingly no mistakes to be made, and had one asked him how he would face such a thing if it happened he would have laughed. Yes, he would admit that it was possible but down inside he could not believe that it ever would. Life was logical, it was sane, and did not go deliberately out of its way to make trouble for one who did not make trouble for it.

He had his dinner and enjoyed it far more than he had expected to. The nurse, Miss Wells, ate with them for the last time and told them cheerful stories about her student days. He had liked her because she did not take her work so impersonally that it warped her warm sense of humanity, and because she did not make you feel she was an automaton and that Roy had been taken care of by a machine. When she was gone he and Helen would be alone together, and perhaps he would be afraid unless he could separate her from the boy in his mind. It was not good to submerge your identity with another's, for when that person was gone you might not be able to recover it, and would always remain a ghost of yourself haunted by the reality of the other self you had lost.

When Miss Wells had finished the story of the interne who had been given a forcible bath in mercurochrome, he had looked at Roy's former place and said: "It's too bad, old chap, you can't hear it. Just imagine what a terrible time he must have had trying to get it off." He could see his son laughing, a laughter which lit up his face and made his brown eyes and tousled hair, hair that would never stay parted, shake with his mirth. What a happy figure he seemed! But it was not always so, for he sometimes worried about his lessons, about the occasional meanness of his friends which he could not understand, or about his mother, for the boy had never been able to take her for granted as much as most boys did theirs.

"Helen, I think we ought to take Roy some fresh flowers next week."

But she was talking to the nurse and apparently did not hear him. He had always liked his dining-room better than

any other he had seen, because it was wide, with a high ceiling that gave good ventilation. Many dining-rooms if they did not have the smell of food from the preceding meal at least gave one that impression. What he most admired about it was its lack of ornate decoration, the kind which induced one's feminine friends to say "How cute!" or "Isn't it a darling?" for Helen had good taste which had been fostered by a brief training in art, and she did not confuse simplicity with the artificial. One's home, he believed, should be first of all a place where one could rest, and not a living illustration of even the best examples of commercial art; and in this Helen had agreed with him.

After dinner he sat in the library and read W. H. Hudson until Roy came between the pages and asked: "Dad, can I have a dollar?" Yesterday? No, it was actually much longer than that. It was a week, a month, or, no, it was something he would not and could not forget. In the last two days people whom he barely knew had come and said to him as though they had been through or were going through what he was, and knew the value, the efficacy, of forgetting: "If you don't want to lose your mind, Mr. Cotter, you've got to forget him. I'm sure if your son were here now and could see you he would want you to. He was always an unselfish boy and —" And not at all like his father. No, they had not said that to him, but he said it for them. Perhaps it would be better if people openly said what they thought instead of implying it, for sometimes they hurt just as much.

But Roy . . . It was a week ago today at three in the afternoon that his son had been seriously injured while coasting, and not expected to live. Their calmness in telling him was harsh, almost brutal, but neither would he be able to forget the stoniness of Helen's face when after incredible delays he had reached the hospital: it was cold, devoid of feeling like the mask which was all that was finally left of Roy's face . . .

Somehow, Hudson, for all the occasional beauty of his prose, eluded him, slipped off his consciousness like the oratory of many after-dinner speakers. He did not blame Hud-

son; he blamed himself for his lack of concentration which made each succeeding sentence more meaningless than the former, until they ran riot and occupied the entire page as a huge blot of type. He put the book aside and lit another cigaret, then sat staring at the row of bookcases opposite him . . . He saw Roy come into the room and stop before one of them, then turn and look inquiringly at him.

"Do you mind if I take the *Sketch-Book*, Dad?"

"Not at all. I'm glad you like good reading; most boys your age want cowboy or boy-scout stories."

"I do too, but the teacher said this book was required, so I thought I'd better start reading it now."

"Oh! I see." He was conscious of a sudden feeling of resentment, and when Roy, who reached to his full height to get the book, knocked over another and finally let the glass door slam, he added. "For Heaven's sake, Roy, don't you know how to take a book out of a case without breaking it? A boy of your age should have some sense."

"I'm sorry, Dad. I'll try and remember next time." He stood respectfully, with his head bowed, and waited for his father's permission to leave the room.

"You can go." After a time he could hear only his retreating footsteps on the stairs and then a silence. Was it good for Roy to take his words so meekly? In most circumstances, of course, he did not approve of a boy's talking back to his father, but when his father was wrong or unjustified in his criticism it showed that he was man enough to defend his rights. It troubled him, because he feared his son was not always as well-behaved as he pretended to be, and that later this would somehow be a reflection against his upbringing. Above all, he did not want the boy to become a moral prig, one so self-righteous that he would later make himself a regulator of people's morals, nor did he want him to be a victim of a martyr-complex that took delight in self-humiliation. He had not, he hoped, directed him too much, for it was better to let him follow his own bent, and to forego any temptation to try to run his life for him. He must warn Helen to be more careful in handling Roy . . .

It was futile to continue the attempt to read. He would rather talk to Fred, to Helen, to anyone to whom he might say something that had not been carefully weighed and found wanting. He left the library to look for Helen, walked through the dining-room and the serving-room without seeing her. In the pantry there was an acrid smell of steam and soap. Perhaps she and Miss Wells had gone out.

He asked the cook, who was cleaning some sauce-pans: "Have you seen Mrs. Cotter?"

"No, Mr. Cotter, not since right after dinner."

After looking upstairs he decided he had better take out his car and go for a short drive to Crestwood or Springdale and return through Sherman Park. At least no one would see him and he might be able to forget.

Outside it was much colder and the sky less threatening. He listened to the motor as he drove slowly; the cylinders were cold and the combustion poor, but after a half mile it warmed up so that it no longer needed special attention. Now he really enjoyed the driving, the wide well-paved highway, the sound of the car and of the wind against the shield — why hadn't he ridden oftener at this time of the night? Because Roy and Helen had something else they would rather do. But could he blame them when only now he realized how much they might have liked it?

When he reached Sherman Park, he decided to stop at Joe's for a moment, for even in the closed car it was cold, and perhaps a glass or two of beer would warm him. He left the car facing the side of the house, and at his ring Joe came to the door.

"Pretty cold, Mr. Cotter."

"Yes, Joe, the weather's changed since this afternoon, but as long as it doesn't rain I won't mind."

"What'll you have?"

He felt much warmer, and as he talked to Joe he was conscious of his spirits glowing until they threatened to encompass the entire room. It was strange, too, because he recalled saying to his friends, even to Joe himself, what a deuce of a gloomy place it was with its bar of dull brown

wood and its mirrors which no amount of polishing would make reflect one's image.

"You never met my son, did you, Joe?"

"Nope. I don't think you ever said anything about having one." He propped his foot against the side of the bar and continued to polish a glass.

Was it possible he had never mentioned Roy, a subject that was scarcely ever from his thoughts? He must tell the boy what a friendly, enterprising chap Joe was, always ready to do one a favor, to go the limit to see one got what one wanted.

"Why don't you bring him with you sometime?"

"He doesn't drink."

"What's the matter, a teetotaller?"

"He's too young, only twelve."

"There's nothing like bringing up your children on beer, makes 'em fat and strong; look at the Germans, they even feed it to their babies."

"I know, but Roy's fat enough as it is. Besides, I don't think its true or I'd be fat."

Joe admitted: "You're thin all right, but maybe it's only your face, for your body looks heavy enough."

Two men came in and ordered something to drink, and Joe was busy for a time. While he drank another beer he stared at the room beyond, through a curtained doorway through which drifted smoke and the sound of high voices. He hoped Helen had not so far forgotten herself as to go to the theater, for if any of her friends saw her there they would gossip about it for days to come, would make her feel she had committed a heinous crime . . . He was tempted to go in and join them when he again heard the crows whirling about his head, their voices raised in cawing cry . . . The straps rattled against the metal bars of the frame and the minister's lips intoned a quiet prayer that was pitched so low he wondered if he heard it, or hearing it, wondered whether it was not an hallucination . . . The curtain parted and a young man with curly brown hair entered from the next room and approached the bar with a careful though

determined stride. He ordered and drank two ryes in succession without lifting his head; and he tried to recall where he had seen the fellow before, as his eyes, the contour of his face and chin, seemed somehow familiar.

Pushing his own glass aside he lit a cigaret and stared at him through the smoke: "Did you ever try it with beer chasers?" he asked the young man.

Apparently the latter had not heard him for he continued to look before him, yet when the matter was to all intents closed the other inquired:

"You speaking to me?"

"Yes."

"Well I like 'em straight without any of your damn trimmings."

He had turned as he spoke and his full face was now toward him. With a queer inward sensation he recognized him: "Why, Roy, what are you doing here? Didn't I tell you —"

In an instant the other's face widened with fury. "You can't tell me what to do, do you hear? I'm damned if I'll stand for any more of your nagging! All my life you've nagged and nagged — you can go to hell, do you hear? Yes — and Helen, too!"

He tried to speak, to stop Roy's mad words, but the room and Roy only whirled all the faster until, vaguely, he recalled falling, his hand failing to catch the edge of the bar . . . The crows, the crows, oh, God! how he wished they would cease their eternal cawing, for tomorrow was Saturday and he did not want it to rain . . .

In the car again, he drove slowly home, glad that he had stopped at Joe's and had something to warm him. He would rather stay in the house of an evening and read, but one couldn't do that every night, for though books were indeed excellent things, one could not measure them, gauge their essential value, unless one had had some experience with living to balance them against: some common divisor. Or perhaps he would play bridge occasionally, with Roy and Helen, for the boy despite his age was a good player, but

Helen was a poor one who could not remember what cards had been played or what signals had been given. Yet they had had such good times together, more, he was inclined to believe, than most parents had with their children; for many in order to gain their respect treated them as inferior beings, and failed to get it, or if they did, their children often hated them and left home as early in life as it was possible.

He put the car in the garage and returned to the house. A brief search revealed that neither Helen nor Miss Wells had returned, so he decided to wait for them in the living-room. Tomorrow he would have to go back to the office, would give orders, write letters and see people just as though nothing had happened; at five or a quarter to, he would leave for home where he would play bridge or read or go to the movies, and the years in their monotony would lengthen and contract until a lifetime seemed but a moment of existence, an indefinite point of time in which the only reality was the eternal present where one was conscious of drawing breath, and an hour earlier and an hour later were conjectures of the mind which it was best not to dwell too much upon if one valued the sanity of mere living.

He stared at the wall. Would Roy always occupy so large a place in his thoughts as he did now? Or would he forget, and in remembering recall only that which had pleased him, or awakened a certain indefinable sense of pride? The temptation was great. He did wish, though, that he had been more considerate of Roy and valued him as a friend before he valued him as a son, and not, above all, tried to possess him with that completeness which left the boy nothing of his personal self he could call his own.

Distantly he heard the clock strike ten-thirty. He took a cigar from the humidor beside him and lit it, smoked for several minutes, and then wondered why it tasted so bitter, for a thirty-five cent cigar ought literally to taste as though it were made of honey. He laid it aside and sat deeper in his chair. The room was warm, a heavy warmth that through the smell of cigar smoke had the odor of plush chairs, of chocolates in an open dish on the table. No won-

der his coal bill was large when Sam stoked the furnace too full. He must tell Roy . . .

"Haven't you gone to bed yet? It's late."

"I know it is, Dad; it's most ten o'clock."

"It's more than that; it just struck ten-thirty."

Roy came further into the room and looked at him with large disappointed eyes. "I wanted to say good-night to mother, but I can't find her."

"Your mother will be home soon, so go to bed. I'll tell her to kiss you good-night when she comes in."

He scuffed his feet and moved uneasily, one arm twined about the back of a chair.

"Can't you stand still! What do you want to say to me?"

"Nothing, Dad — nothing."

"But there must be something?" He spoke more kindly.

The boy ran to him and put his head in his lap, sobbing for a moment.

"Why, what's the matter, old chap? There's nothing in the world to cry about. You have everything you want, a good home, plenty to eat and money to spend, and a father and mother who wouldn't have anything in the world happen to you." A peculiar tenseness in his throat made him stop and look at Roy, who had raised his head.

"I'm afraid, Dad, I'm afraid!"

"Afraid of what?" But the boy only shook his head, and a moment later went from the room as he had come. He could not understand it, for Roy was not a boy who worried about things he could not comprehend. Perhaps he was ill and should be taken to some good doctor for an examination, as any one of a hundred things might be causing it. Undoubtedly it was nothing more than a slight nervous disturbance which could be corrected without difficulty if it was at once attended to. He would have Helen do it in the morning . . .

The cigar was almost consumed before he heard them on the porch, and he went to the door to let them in. They were both a little breathless from too fast walking in the damp night air, and they talked so quickly together that it

was some minutes before he was able to learn where they had been. At last it appeared that they had seen some friends of Miss Wells and had talked and talked until they were talked out.

"But, Bob, we expected to find you in bed?"

"I haven't felt like going. I've been sitting in the living-room."

They went into the parlor and Helen excused herself with some trivial remark about the kitchen, and he and Miss Wells were alone. He took out his cigarets and individually fingered them before he at last selected one, and after lighting it he looked at Miss Wells, who had seated herself opposite him. She had opened the coat about her shoulders which had concealed her uniform, and from her detached attitude evidently expected him to speak.

"Helen said you were leaving early tomorrow. Can't you wait and take breakfast with us?"

"I'm sorry that I must leave so early, though it's kind of you to ask me again."

"Not at all." He hesitated, then asked: "My wife seems very nervous, do you think she —?"

"She's had a very trying day. I think she'd better have a sedative before she retires." She stared at her lap, and continued with: "Your wife is more emotional than I thought she was. You'll have to be careful of her for a month or so."

"Hadn't I better have someone to watch her?"

"I don't think it's necessary, and she would probably resent it. The best thing for you to do is to take her away for a week or two."

"She feels the thing very much?" He snuffed out the half-burnt cigaret in the ash-tray.

"Yes, but she takes after her son in concealing it — she's proud."

Proud? Yes, Helen was proud or she would never have shown that stony look when people were present. Of course most of them misunderstood it and considered her heartless, but fundamentally the attitude was wrong in that

it made people of her type pay doubly for their repression through the shock to their nervous systems. But Helen seldom cried, in fact, he could remember having seen her cry but twice in his life. Perhaps Miss Wells was magnifying his wife's condition for some reason of her own . . .

It was almost an hour later before he and Helen were prepared for bed. He had undressed and gotten in and was lying on his back so he could watch her combing her hair before the mirror of her dressing table. He had not realized how tired he was until he had lain there a moment and felt the numb sensation in the muscles of his legs, and the rim of pain across his spine and shoulders, but when he closed his eyes tightly so the lids pressed hard against the eye-ball and opened them again, the room seemed more sober, better balanced in the proper dimensions of things. Emotionally he was more exhausted than he had ever been, and the prospect of sleep was at once fearful as well as comforting.

"Please hurry and turn out the light; it's getting late."

She gave another pat to her hair as she spoke: "I'm coming as fast as I can. If you'll move over the light can't catch you in the eyes."

He wanted to tell her he wasn't afraid of the light but of sleep: something his conscious mind could not control . . . Why, oh, why wouldn't the chauffeur hurry? He'd be late, too late: it would be all over before he got there; and Roy waiting patiently, hopelessly, for him. "For Christ's sake, man, drive faster — faster!" "But the red lights, sir!" "To hell with the red lights — Go!" . . . The road led up the bluff among tall brown building swept clean of their snow by the cold wind, and as he left the car and walked toward the central building he felt it cutting him across the face and legs. In the corridors there was the pervading odor of sanitation and the noise of the gale whimpering at the cracks of the doors. Then there were many minutes and a heat that was oppressive. Roy was in white and so was Helen, but, no, it was her face; and the nurse's voice, quiet and subdued, was a warning, though he needed no warning, for in promising nothing it yet gave hope, for hope was all

that still remained . . . Now they were waiting in hard stiff-backed chairs with their feet on a floor-matting that seemed as hard as their chairs. The quiet, too, was hard like their chairs and in the background was the wind again, shaking the glass with its cold breath, whining a dirge at the sills . . . Waiting, waiting — always.

Outside, the car was drawn up close to the building, its front pointed in, and when he opened the door to give directions to the chauffeur the man stepped out and stood laughing at him, his brown hair and eyes filled with mirth. "Why, Roy, what do you mean by playing such a trick on us!" And in his joy at seeing him he struck him lightly across the back and then stood off to admire his long trousers, the breadth of his shoulders and the fine erectness of his figure. But Roy pushed him aside and kept on insisting: "Wasn't it a good joke, Dad? a good one on you?" "No, it was a hell of a joke; you nearly frightened your mother and me to death." Roy's face clouded, and he bowed his head. "I'm sorry, Dad, I didn't mean to." And before he could move his hand to stop him, Roy had stepped into the building and was gone . . .

He felt the warm pressure of Helen's body against his back as she got into bed beside him; then there was a brief silence until she coughed several times as though clearing her throat. He turned toward her, touching her cheek with his fingers: "You're not crying, are you?"

"No. Something stuck in my throat and brought tears to my eyes, but it's gone now."

"I think I'll take a sedative or I'll never be able to sleep. I've been lying here for what seems hours."

"Please don't take too big a one . . . "

When finally he got into bed again he heard her mumbling. "I miss him so — I miss him — " But as he was on the point of speaking to her, her breathing told him she was asleep . . .

A week was seven days, a hundred and sixty eight hours and . . . Slowly but inexorably the minutes of the great

clock in his brain lengthened into days, and the hands in their precise and spaced monotony beat the days into a week. It was strange how he could be conscious of the infinite fraction that constituted the passing of time without being aware of it as a whole, as strange as the feeling he used to have when he awoke at night and could gauge to within a few moments the hours that had elapsed since he had fallen asleep. But it was the minutes as they were contracted in his consciousness that counted. To go to New York and work, to come home and sleep, and to go again was supposed to be a part of living, but not living in which thought was in any way paramount. What he most paradoxically wanted was to think without thinking, to make his thoughts bend toward some malleable end and not go on as a circle in which Roy was the central and deciding axis who kept turning everything in toward himself. So ever present was this circular sensation that he almost began to hate his son. Couldn't Roy appreciate the many things that had been done for him, and thus be less exacting in his demands? Roy need have no fear that they would forget him, but he must not take advantage of their love by continually forcing his presence upon their most secret thoughts. Roy's consolation was that they could go at will and live with him in the past, could gild it with the brilliant shades of their memory until . . . No! No! There must be no retreat, no regression. He must face the past courageously, conquer his emotions through sheer force of his will; Roy would never feel proud of a father who gave in so easily to the tyranny of the subconscious mind . . .

At the breakfast table a week later Helen said to him above the bread she was toasting: "Here it is almost ten days and you haven't said a thing more about our going away."

And he found himself answering: "I know, dear, but we've been so busy at the office that I felt I couldn't take the time. Besides, I don't think it's necessary."

"Not necessary for you, perhaps, but for me."

"Why, Helen!" He laid his napkin aside and looked at

her across the table. There was an expression in her eyes that he had never seen there before, an air of bitter resignation that reminded him of what Miss Wells had said. "You should have spoken to me before this."

"But you haven't been well yourself and we've all been worried about you. I don't think you realize how many queer things you've said and done in the last week or so. Fred heard from Joe that you had been to his place that night and had suddenly hurled an empty glass at him and run from the room as though you had seen a ghost."

"No, I never did that — I couldn't have."

"But you did, and I have seen you do things equally as strange, for instance, stop without warning when you were entering a room and stare at an empty chair as if you saw someone sitting in it."

He held his head for a moment, glancing before him: "It doesn't seem possible —"

"What with Roy and now you, maybe I'm going a little mad."

"No, no, don't say that. We'll go away soon — tomorrow if I can arrange it. I've been very selfish, Helen, you must forgive me; I've thought so much about Roy that I've neglected you entirely."

"You must forget him; you must think about your business and me."

"I'm afraid I can't."

"But you must try!"

Though he played bridge on the train that morning and talked and joked with his friends, he felt aware of a growing uneasiness, a mounting self-doubt that made him commit blunders which were unthinkable. He could not keep his mind on his work, and everything that he did had to be done over again to the complete bewilderment of his secretary, until at last he became convinced that there was little good in his remaining in his office. So at one he left for Rosewood, ferried across the river to the train, where he took a seat in the smoking car. Abruptly he recalled what Helen had asked him to do for her this morning: "But you

must try!" Of course he would; he would do anything to help her. Suppose he were to go again to Oak Ridge and see once more the brown turf and the sky beyond? It might aid him, for his lapses of memory were growing acute, and he was seeing things that were indubitably not there. Yes, he could at least try that.

He got his car which had been parked in the garage below the station and drove out Rosewood Boulevard, and minutes later was winding up the drives of Oak Ridge. He left the car and cut across the grass. It was much colder today and the turf where it had been walked on was frozen in solid ridges that threatened to trip him at any casually-placed step, but the sky was lighter and the wind fresh in his face. At a glance he saw that Helen had preceded him and had removed the dead flowers, and he was glad because he knew they would somehow have depressed him . . .

Now he was conscious that his feet were becoming numb with the cold and he began to walk up and down, his hands behind his back, his head well up and looking before him. The air was quiet of sound save of autos passing faintly along the highway a quarter of a mile beyond and the wind talking low to itself in the branches of the pines. But the crows? No, the sky was free of their dark bodies and their cawing voices, which seemed to blend with each new mood. Hadn't he read somewhere in Audubon, or was it in Burroughs or Hudson? — that crows — but that was superstition and was given for what it was worth. Suddenly he felt the need of music, something soothing and perhaps even as repetitious in theme as Ketelbey's "Monastery Garden," or Massenet's "Angelus," until on further thought he remembered that in the latter the too constant tolling of the bells had often jarred him emotionally, made him continue to hear their pealing long after they had ceased. A happier note would be better: the children's suite of Debussy's that Roy had liked so much — what was the name? But it eluded him, and he realized that he would recall it only when it no longer mattered.

He lit a cigaret and stared before him across the knoll,

at the spires of Rosewood and the hills beyond. A year ago he and Roy had taken a long hike in order to study the red squirrels who had a retreat in a grove of trees behind an old stone quarry that had long been abandoned. He had been reading John Muir aloud and had got Roy sufficiently interested to accompany him. Now he closed his eyes a moment and again he could see the path up the ridge and feel his son's warm hand against his body when often he was forced to halt because of the difficulty of the path . . . "Say, Dad, do you see those red berries in there? Well I'm going to get some of them." "But we haven't the time, it's a long way yet." "I'm going to get them just the same, I'm hungry." "But suppose you get lost and I can't find you?" "Don't ever worry about me, dad, I can take care of myself." "But I can't leave you here and go on alone." "Please forget about me and I'll be with you before you can say 'Jack Robinson'."

"Why, Bob, what are you doing here on a day like this? Are you ill? Don't you know you'll get pneumonia?"

Helen had come upon him unseen and now had a worried hand on his shoulder.

"What about your being here? Have you any better right than I?" He shrugged off her arm and mechanically put out his cigaret with his heel.

"No—no! I was troubled about you after what you had said this morning. I was afraid you might do something you would regret."

He felt a warm impulse to be kind to her and he put his arm around her waist and asked: "But how did you know I was here? No one knew."

"I didn't either. I guessed it after I had tried to get you by phone at the office; they said you had left for home."

"Come! We'll forget our quarrelling and leave Roy in peace."

"Yes, dear, that's just what he wants: for you and me to leave him in peace." She paused, and taking a hold of his arm so that he had to look at her she went on, "I know what

you're thinking, Bob, but please believe me when I say I miss him terribly—terribly!”

“I do believe you.”

They drove home without further words, and when he was once again alone in his library, Helen having gone to supervise something about the house, he wondered if she were not right in saying Roy wished to be left in peace. It was altogether possible that, with all his desire to dwell too intensively upon the past, Helen's feelings toward his son had been truer than his, less selfish in that it was willing to grant the boy a complete and separate existence of his own. No, there would never be a successful retreat into the past in so far as he was concerned, for there, there was only another series of mistakes to be made, if not in spite of anything he could do, then because of what he consciously did to prevent them. It seemed better to go on with courage and believe that if his son could not now live on in him he could live on for Roy . . .

He heard Helen calling to him from upstairs: “Bob, can't you remember to tell Sam about the furnace? It's frightfully hot and stuffy up here.” Yes, it was also hot in the library; he would have to warn Sam against overstoking. And perhaps they could go to Cold Harbor or Beechwood Springs soon—perhaps on Helen's birthday.

EARTHBORN

By FREDERIC COVER

We have our birth
Of quiet power out of silences
Close to the earth
In peaceful valleys where the march of time
Is slow and kind,
And only the inevitable tread
Of death, slow-moving, leveling to earth,
Can bring a change.
Even of this we do not speak with pain
Nor yet in mirth,
But with the innate power that we gain
Close to the earth
We say, "This man is dead
Just thirteen years — come fall.
My, how time flies
In looking back!" But presently
We know that time has scarcely moved at all.

We are not awed
By loneliness, but in the quiet power
Born of the earth, we can revere a God
And bless the shower
Whose gentle fingers, helping at the birth
Of a fresh green,
Caress the earth
And wash the sod clean.
For we are kin to sod
And to the growing things that nod
Before the shower.
Even as these we spring from earth
Where generations of our fathers trod
And wooed the earth,
A virgin, into ripe fecundity.
This was our birth.

The past is a row
Of figures drifting over fallow ground:
The present nothing more,
For we all know,
By word of mouth, by kindly mimicry
And by our own experience with the fields,
The character of those who went before.
And we have found
No greater sense of actual intimacy
With these that go
Beside us to a similar destiny.
Here time is slow:
The present yields
Unto the calling past and presently
These will have joined the row
Of phantom faces held in memory.
Thus we shall go.

We, who have known
The silences and power of the earth,
Do not bemoan
The ultimate conclusion to our birth.
We have lived close to earth
And we have heard the solemn monotone,
"Go in and view the body and return,"
Too many times
Unshrinking, to be filled with mystery
That even thus shall we too, presently,
Be viewed.
And to have grown
Close to the earth is to be nearly free.

THE THRESHING RING

By LEO L. WARD

Larry Martin, the station agent at Flora, stood with a hand shading his eyes in the door of the little dull green station. Scattered in little groups along the platform were the blue shirts and wide straw hats of many farmers. The men were gazing into the distance where they could see nothing except the glint and quiver of the two rails which joined and disappeared just before they reached the cleft in the bluish line of woods a half-mile away on the prairie.

"Forty-eight just left Shelby," the agent was saying in a loud, hearty voice meant for everybody on the platform. "Ought to be comin' any minute now. Phelps over at Shelby said she pulled out of there already." There was a short silence; then a murmur of eager talk swept along the station platform. "Yeah, yeah, there she is! Smoke up there in the woods now. And she's coalin' hard, looks like. I tell you, boys, haulin' threshing machines, takes coal for that." Larry Martin's loose blue shirt quivered as he chuckled and looked at three or four farmers standing near him on the platform. All the squinted faces in front of the station suddenly broke into pleased grins.

"About the first threshin' rig you ever unloaded, ain't it, Larry?" It was Jay Westwright who spoke in an even, controlled tone from where he stood beside the station agent. Westwright was a tall, straight man, with a strip of grayish hair showing beneath his wide hat on either side of his long, thin face.

"Yeah, first threshing rig we ever put down here. What is it? Red River, didn't you say?"

"Yeah, Red River Special. Farmer's Friend, they call it." Jay's long face turned to gaze proudly up the track again.

A short distance up the platform and out at the very curb, stood a little man with a slight bump high on his back. This was Burl Teeters, and he was gazing very fixedly and very thoughtfully up the track, his sweat-stained straw hat tilted far back on his little bald head and his hands shoved deeply

into his belt. Beside him were the two Hamel boys, both also looking into the distance. Burl seemed to pay no attention to the excited talk going on all about him, except to throw an occasional scowl over his shoulder when Jay Westwright was talking. From time to time Lar and Zeb Hamel turned bearded faces to listen to what the station agent was saying.

"Where you goin' to set her down, Larry?" Jay Westwright asked. "Marley Simms over at the elevator said we could get all the water we wanted right there at the engine room. Wonder if we could set her down over there beside the engine room."

"Sure, Jay. We'll set that rig down just anywhere you boys want."

"Think that would give us room, Mr. Kenyon? Right in there between the grain office and the engine room." It was in a quiet, respectful tone that Westwright asked the question of a youngish but serious looking man who stood beside him. The youngish man wore a pair of neat blue overalls, above the bib of which a white collar and a narrow dark tie showed. He was Mr. Kenyon, the expert who had arrived yesterday from the factory.

"Yes, that will be all right. That will give us plenty of room." Kenyon spoke in a firm, quiet voice, and with a thin, quick smile.

"It's a pretty big machine though, ain't it?" asked Larry Martin. Everybody turned again at the sound of the agent's loud voice — everybody except Burl Teeters, who had now moved a few steps farther up the platform.

"Yeah, it's a forty-five inch rig," Jay said. "Thirty, forty-five, of course. Had to be that big for a ring our size."

"Well now, if that ain't enough room . . ."

"Oh yes, that will be plenty of room, boys — plenty." The youngish man in the neat blue overalls shook his head decisively.

Inside the station a thin insistent ringing suddenly drowned the monotonous chatter of the telegraph, and the agent, as he turned to the door with a wave of his black satin half-

sleeve, shouted back to everyone on the platform, "Well, there she is, boys. She's comin' right in."

The wild, prolonged shrill of a whistle came from up the tracks. Little clusters of men edged farther out on the platform, and there was a murmur of subdued talk. Piggy Bailey jumped down from his perch beside a striped canvas mail bag on the station truck, and pushed the truck out to the low curb of the platform, where he stood with one arm resting jauntily on the mail bag as the tall black bulk of the engine came rolling and grinding toward the station. The little clusters of men suddenly shrank back closer to the station as the engine came nearer.

Piggy Bailey was shouting at the engineer. "Got any thrashin' machines on this here train? We don't want nothin' smaller than thashin' machines in this man's town." The engineer merely waved a big glove genially as the engine went hissing and grinding past the station.

The crowd, which had become quite silent, was now watching the box cars go swaying slowly past, one after another. At last a glint of shiny steel appeared above the red top of a box car. Then everybody suddenly saw the hood of a threshing blower, and a moment later the threshing machine loomed beside the station platform. As the cars moved slowly past, the threshing engine became sharp and black against the blue sky and the separator incredibly huge and shiny. The flat car came slowly to a stop, blocking the street that ran past the station. Then the men — all except Westwright, Kenyon, the station agent and Piggy Bailey — began pushing and pulling each other off the platform into the street. Soon a chorus of jumbled talk arose out around the flat car.

A trainman came running along the tracks. Larry Martin was shouting to him to set the threshing machine over beside the elevator. In just a little while a series of clankings came along the cars, and the whole train seemed to shudder once or twice. Then the great black engine and the red, shiny separator moved slowly away from the station on the long flat car.

It was only a short time, however, before the threshing machine came floating back on the side tracks with a brakeman riding in front of it. Then Burl Teeters went hopping across the two sets of tracks toward the engine room at the elevator where he began waving direction to the brakeman. With a shriek of brakes the long flat car came to a stop just beyond the low red engine room.

A moment later Burl was clambering over the edge of the car. Though his hat fell backwards on to the tracks, he seemed not to notice it. Now he was up on the car. Without his big hat he looked ridiculously small beside the tall wheels of the threshing engine. He edged his way around one of the great wheels. Suddenly he reached up, grasped the flange of the big steel belt wheel and tugged at it violently once or twice. The wheel turned slightly, and Burl stood back looking at it quizzically as though only half satisfied. Then Piggy Bailey whistled shrilly through his teeth from the station platform. The whistle came clear and high above the mumble of talk from the crowd now gathered about the flat car. "Hey there," Piggy was shouting, "Hey, Burl, you the engineer? Thought you were goin' to be blower man." Burl grinned, a bit sheepishly. The crowd laughed. Then Burl shouted back at Piggy, "No sir, I'm the engineer on this rig. I'm not no blower man." He turned again to examine the engine. Then he climbed up to the high seat on the tool box. With one hand on the steering wheel, he pushed a lever with the other. Now someone shouted at him again. "What do you think of her, Burl? Hey, Burl, think she'll run all right?" It was Ambrose Mull, a huge man with faded green suspenders curving tight over his blue stomach, who stood half way across the tracks. Ambrose chuckled to himself and turned to grin at Jay Westwright back on the station platform. Burl seemed at first to pay no attention to the shouting, but finally he turned to yell over his shoulder, "Yeah, guess maybe she'll run all right." Then he started climbing down from the engine, but stopped to open the fire box and peer inside. When at last he was on the ground he turned to Bert Helker, a tall man with

slouched shoulders, and one of the Hamels, who was standing very near the car, and pointed a crooked outstretched thumb up at the engine. He was telling them that the only trouble might be the boiler. It didn't seem built back over the fire box quite far enough. "But I reckon it'll work good enough. Work all right if you get the right feller firin' it."

Soon there were many men working busily about the flat car. Kenyon, the expert, was over there now and he was explaining to the men how to brace some huge timbers against the car. But above all the other noises, the hammering and talking and laughing, came the shrill voice of Burl Teeters in almost constant questions and suggestions. He kept asking Kenyon particularly whether he thought the timbers were large enough for "an engine as big as that."

After a little while Jay Westwright and the station agent came slowly across the tracks from the platform, the agent carrying a piece of paper in his hand. Then Kenyon moved out from among the men, and the three stood talking together in the shade of a maple tree over beside the grain office, while the work went steadily on about the flat car.

But Burl also left the car and went over to the three men standing beside the grain office. He faced Westwright. "Well," he said, "how about some coal, Mr. Jay? Ain't you supposed to be gettin' the coal? A man can't fire no engine on hot air."

"The coal'll be here in plenty of time. Don't you be worryin' about the coal, Teeters."

"Yeah! You think you're runnin' the whole works. Well, I'll tell you one thing you're not runnin'. An' that's the engine. I'm the one that's running that engine." Burl's voice, as always when he grew excited or angry, had risen so shrill and high that it was almost like a frantic tinkle above the noises back around the flat car.

Jay Westwright's thin face became still narrower and very hard, then slowly broke into a faint grin as he turned to continue talking to Kenyon. Burl wheeled about contemptuously and went back toward the other men.

The lifting and bracing and wedging of the great beams

went steadily on, amidst the constant loud talk and the shout-laughter of the men. But it was almost two hours later before the threshing outfit, by means of several heavy ropes and pulleys, was finally got off the flat car.

And it was now standing out in the street, directly in front of the grain office. Wisps of steam were playing about the clean new cylinders, and black smoke was tumbling up lazily from the wide funnel of the engine over the street and across the roof of the grain office. Kenyon, the expert, stood between the engine and the separator, with one foot resting on the big red separator tongue, while he talked briskly with Jay Westwright and Bert Helker. He was asking about Teeters, whether they were going to let him try to run the engine, and Jay was saying that Burl could probably learn to run it all right, if Mr. Kenyon would just keep a close watch on him for a while. It would be easier than trying to stop him from going on the engine, once he got it in his head this way. Bert Helker's wide hat rim flapped agreement with Jay. But already Burl was up on the high platform of the engine, bent forward examining the water gauge. By this time a large group of men had gathered on the sidewalk in front of the grain office, and on both sides of the street little clusters of women, and clerks in aprons, stood watching the threshing machine.

Suddenly the brass whistle on the engine spurted steam. There was a deafening blast. With Kenyon standing just behind him on the engine platform, Burl Teeters slowly pulled a lever and the big belt wheel began to race idly. A moment later the engine moved forward with a great clank. The separator lurched once or twice. And then the threshing machine was going up the street under a cone of dense black smoke. Burl Teeters kept turning the steering wheel, now one way, now the other. The low, wide wheels of the separator wandered slightly to the right, then back to the middle of the street again, and as the great machine moved on, the lugs of the engine wheels left a waving track behind them. From the door of the butcher shop Hunk Keller in his spotted white apron shouted to Burl above the puffing

of the engine and the rumble of the separator. "Hold her down there, Burl. You better watch the speed limit." Farther up the street Joe Neff, standing on the curb in front of the pool room, lifted his shrill, whining voice to ask, "Where's your firin' cap, Burl? An' say, you ought to wear gloves for that. Where's your gloves, Burl?" Burl Teeters seemed hardly to hear the shouting, but only turned from time to time to say something to Kenyon, whose eyes never left the engine all the way up the street.

The threshing machine had soon passed from between the two rows of little wooden store buildings and had entered the lane of dense maple trees beyond. Through the trees the smoke floated upward, fading into the clear blue sky above Flora. At last it was becoming smaller and smaller out at the end of the street, and then on the road that led away from the town. But some of the men in front of the stores kept watching the threshing machine until it was only a black dot out in the level haze of the wheatfields.

The threshing was beginning at Bert Helker's place, for Bert was at the north end of the ring and it was his turn this year. They had started in the afternoon when the grain would be quite dry, and by two o'clock they had already threshed off four loads of bundles.

Now two more wagons pulled in very close to the sides of the machine and the men began pitching the sheaves off their tall loads onto the conveyer, where the sheaves went leaping, one after another, into the dusty mouth of the separator, to be swallowed behind the flashing knives which fed the cylinder. In a little while three or four other loads came up, to await their turn back behind the engine. The drivers all climbed down from their wagons and gathered in the shade of one of the loads, where they watched the threshing with pleased grins on their faces.

Over beside the engine stood one of the Hamel boys, leaning on a pitchfork and talking to Burl Teeters, who sat, bent far forward, on the high box of the engine, directly behind the big belt wheel. Burl was wearing a little black cap with

a celluloid bill. With one hand resting lightly on a tilted lever, he watched the separator closely, giving only occasional quick glances down at Hamel as he answered a question or asked the other man how he liked the "exack line on that belt there." Burl's eye followed the belt intently, where it dipped and twisted and came racing and flashing constantly back to the whirling drive wheel directly in front of him. Once he leaned far out and down toward Hamel, and with one hand pointing to the big belt wheel said, "See that belt there, Zeb — right in the same place on that wheel all the time. Tell you y' got to keep a good line on a belt for that." Then he quickly pulled himself up on his seat again, and the little black cap was craned far forward as before.

Up at the other end of the racing belt, the two men at the engine could see the big red separator only as a great blur of dust. Beyond that the flashing hood of the blower was belching forth its clotted stream of dust and straw in a slow semi-circle. But high above the nearer blur of dust, three men stood together on top of the tall separator. They were Kenyon, the expert, Jay Westwright, and Bert Helker. They were gazing into the dust below them, at the wheels and belts, and the sheaves that kept leaping into the mouth of the separator. From time to time Kenyon and Westwright shouted to each other above the noise of the machine and Kenyon made frantic gestures, while Bert Helker listened curiously and nodded his straw hat until its wide brim would begin to flap. At last Kenyon leaned very close to the other two men and again shouted above the roaring whirl beneath him. Westwright's and Helker's straw hats were tossed upward as if in laughter, and Kenyon lifted his hand to slap Jay on the back. But suddenly Kenyon reeled violently backward. He saved himself from falling from the top of the separator by frantically grasping Westwright's arm with his uplifted hand. Westwright himself staggered, and Helker had fallen in a clump where he stood. The separator had suddenly lurched under them, had literally jumped and then fallen back under them with a dull, loud clank.

There was wild shouting everywhere. But the three men

on the separator did not hear it. They heard only the great clank of the machine beneath them, and then a sharp snap, followed by a clap as of thunder very near them, just in front of the separator itself. At the same instant Kenyon saw what seemed to be the broken end of a belt flying through the sky above him; while Jay Westwright saw two wagons turning rapidly in sharp circles away from the machine. Now the moan and whir of the machine suddenly ceased, and the men on the separator again heard the wild shouting of other men all about them. Then Kenyon, the expert, and Jay Westwright, the shrewd leader of his neighbors, and Bert Helker, who was curious and indolent above most men in this world, saw an extremely strange and monstrous thing. They saw the great black nose of the threshing engine coming straight toward them. Close below them now, directly in front of the separator, they heard the quick panting of the engine. The next moment Kenyon, the expert, was only a blur of arms and legs waving and tossing through the air—he had jumped from the top of the separator. The tall form of Bert Helker had shrunk into a ball on the high back of the separator. And now Jay Westwright was stepping backward in stiff jerks until he almost fell over Helker crouching behind him. Jay stopped rigidly, legs braced wide, one long arm stretched out desperately as if to defend himself, his narrow face lengthened into a stricken stare. Then he heard again the quick, sharp pant of the engine. He saw black tumbling smoke. For an instant he smelt hot grease and steam . . .

He remembered, an indefinite while later, having seen a sudden glint of something beside him, almost beneath him . . . like the shifting, shiny flash of a piston . . . And something huge and dark had passed by him. And nothing had hit the separator. There had been no terrific bump, no crashing of any kind. . . .

Suddenly he knew he could see more clearly. He turned his head slowly, tautly sidewise. What he saw was strangely real and clear. It was the threshing engine moving rapidly away, circling out from the separator. As it moved away he

saw somebody running after it. And he heard someone shouting wildly. He heard many men shouting.

The engine was stopped now. It was stopped out there beyond the low yellow slope of the straw stack. And Kenyon, the expert, was standing on the engine. One of Kenyon's hands was on a lever and his head was turned sharply toward the small humped figure of Burl Teeters on the platform beside him. But Burl's arms were folded lightly and the shiny bill of his little black cap was pushed carelessly up on his forehead as he stood there looking impertinently up into Kenyon's face. Neither of the two men was speaking at all, but simply staring at the other, until finally Kenyon turned abruptly to the levers and started the engine. He was soon bringing the engine around in a wide circle, and was half way back to the separator when Teeters burst into a wild shrieking almost in his ear. Above the loud rumble and pant of the engine there would occasionally rise a shrill word of two . . . "belt loose . . . tighten it . . . push too far . . . " Though Kenyon hardly seemed to hear all this, when at last he had brought the engine to a stop back near the separator Burl was still yelling into his ear. He seemed to be saying something about a "lever slippin'." Kenyon, apparently not listening at all, looked critically down at the broken belt that lay twisted and sprawling along the ground. Several other men came slowly up. One after another they looked at the belt, then doubtfully up at Kenyon, then back at the belt again. Then every face suddenly turned again toward Burl Teeters, who was now leaning far out over the engine's tool box and shaking his short arm up at Jay Westwright, who still stood on top of the separator. Burl was all but screaming at Westwright, in a voice that sounded more than ever like the wild tinkling of a little bell. "Now you're satisfied, eh?" He kept repeating this almost in the same words.

Jay Westwright's head jerked backward. He looked at first startled, then bewildered. But slowly his long face shortened in a sneer, only to widen finally in a look of mingled contempt and pity.

Then with a quick leap Burl was on the ground. He came toward the separator in a half run and stopped just below the end of the conveyer. The yelling began again. "What you have to say about it? I'm just darin' you to say somethin'. I just dare you."

Finally Jay started to answer, and Burl stopped abruptly in a challenging silence. Jay's voice was strangely calm and steady. "No, I ain't got nothin' to say, Burl. I ain't sayin' anything to you. You just be quiet, an' let's not have any trouble. 'Nough trouble, as it is."

Burl stepped back from the separator a pace or two, then burst into a thin, piercing laugh. The laughter continued, growing higher and more shrill until at last it suddenly dropped to a sort of jerky cackle. Then Burl's face became smaller and menacing as he said, "Yeah, you won't say anything! You don't dare, that's what you don't. You don't dare say anything about my runnin' that engine. It's your fault anyway, an' you know it. You bought that engine an' you got slippin' levers, that's what you did. That's what caused all this." Burl's short crooked arm straightened a little as it swept the belt lying on the ground. "I ain't goin' to have nothin' to do with it. It's your fault anyways, 'taint mine. Buyin' that engine . . . it was all your doin's. Now just fix her up if you want to. That's what you can do."

Burl Teeters turned from the separator and started walking away in the direction of Bert Helker's barn up beyond the pasture. The slight bow in his legs seemed very wide as he went on with a kind of short stamping stride. Half way to the barn he wheeled about and suddenly yelled back wildly at Jay Westwright, "If I hear of you sayin' anything . . . " His voice rose so shrill it became unintelligible. He turned again and went on toward the barn. And a little while later the men standing about the threshing machine saw Burl leave Bert Helker's farmyard in a buggy amidst a cloud of dust that kept following the buggy until it was beyond the hedge at the other side of the orchard.

That evening Jay Westwright, Kenyon, Ambrose Mull

and three or four other men who had come over to Bert's after their chores, sat smoking and talking around the feed-way door of Bert's barn. Kenyon and Westwright were seated in the doorway. Bert Helker sat on a milk stool in front of them, and the others were squatting about on the ground amidst a litter of corn cobs that had been thrown out from the feed boxes. Occasionally a glow would come to the end of Kenyon's cigar, and then the glow would drop to his knee. The lights from three or four pipes kept brightening now and again.

"So you don't think it'd do any good to splice it, Mr. Kenyon?" Bert Helker asked.

"No, wouldn't do a bit of good." There was a prolonged glow at the end of Kenyon's cigar. "Splicin' couldn't fix it. That belt was ripped, if you noticed. All along one side. And splicin' wouldn't do a ripped belt any good. Can't. Fabric's gone. Splicin' can't fix fabric like that."

"Looks like they ain't no way out of it. We'll just have to lay off a day." Jay Westwright spoke in a tone of reasoned finality.

"Yes. It'll take a day anyway to get a new belt in here. Even with telegraphing for it right off like I did there this afternoon."

"Funny, but I don't think I see yet just how he did it exactly, Mr. Kenyon." Bert Helker's head lolled slightly to one side as he looked at Kenyon and asked the question.

"Well, as I was tellin' you boys there this afternoon just after he stamped off like that . . . " Ambrose Mull, whose fat shoulders leaned back against the barn started to laugh, and the others followed him. Even after the other men had stopped, Ambrose still chuckled gutturally to himself over beside the door. "As I was saying this afternoon, Teeters must have been monkeyin' with the levers. It's the only thing could have caused it. Of course you heard him tryin' to make out the lever slipped." Kenyon broke into a short, dry laugh, but none of the other men laughed now. They were all listening intently and silently, all except Ambrose Mull who was still chuckling. "Why, a lever couldn't

slip like that. No sir, not on a Red River engine it couldn't."

"Yeah, I kind of think I see now," Bert Helker said slowly. "He just kind of pulled a lever, and then maybe pushed it too much. Got excited like when the belt broke. And as cons'quence . . ."

"Exactly. He was just itchin' around the levers there. Couldn't keep his hands off them. Pulled one ju-u-ust a little, you know. Course the engine started to backin', nacherly. Then the belt snapped, you see. And then — then he got good and scared, and pushed the lever. Probably pushed it clear over. And then . . . well, the next thing we knew that engine was comin' straight for the separator. And boys, how it ever missed that separator is more than I know. Some things are just queer, that's all — I've always said that. Simply no way of explainin' them. And it sure seems like that was one of them, right there this afternoon. . . ."

Kenyon was silent for a while, shaking his head solemnly while he looked down at the ground between his knees. Bert Helker on his milk stool pulled at his chin with a big hand. Ambrose Mull did not chuckle now, but only breathed laboriously over beside the door.

At last Kenyon's cigar glowed again, and he said, "Boys, I tell you if that engine had hit that separator" He paused. "Well, it wouldn't just mean gettin' a new belt. Why, if you used it for kindlin' there wouldn't be enough of that separator left to start fire in the morning."

In the stillness that followed, the dusk seemed to become instantly darker. In the west, very low and far away, only a faint blush was left along the sky. The men sat for a while in silence, watching, watching this patch of light.

At last Kenyon stirred as if to get up from where he was sitting in the doorway, then with one hand grasping the jamb of the door he said in a matter of fact tone, "Well, I reckon we've lost an engineer anyway."

"No sir." Bert Helker had spoken up impulsively. "He'll be right back here, Mr. Kenyon. You wait an' see if he ain't."

Ambrose Mull started sputtering and wheezing over beside the door. "Why, I'll bet ya he'll be right back here in the mornin' again, first thing. Sure as daylight he will. I tell ya, you don't know them Teeterses, Mr. Kenyon. Ya can't, unless you live right over there beside 'em like I do. Oh, I knows 'em, ever' last one of 'em. Knowed their dad afore 'em. An' they're all just the same. The whole lot of 'em always tryin' things they ain't got no business at. Messin' things all up ever' time. But you can't tell 'em nothin'. Can't never tell a Teeters nothin'. They're all half crazy, that's what they are. An' Burl, he's just about the worst of the whole keeboodle."

Another deep voice sounded, detached, as though the speaker was talking to himself, as it came out of the dusk before the barn. "Yeah, Teeters'll be back around that engine again. I just knows he will."

After a moment Kenyon spoke up again, speaking in a helpless, complaining tone. "But boys, what we goin' to do? Can't have that fellow back on that engine again."

"Yes, but you'll never keep him off, Mr. Kenyon," said Jay Westwright. "He'll cause no end of rumpus to all the rest of the ring if we try it."

"Why, there ought to be some way of gettin' rid of him. We've just got to keep him away from that machine, boys."

"Can't never do it, Mr. Kenyon," Jay Westwright said, and Bert Helker repeated it.

"You never can," Bert said. "No use talkin'. You can't keep him away nohow. He's bound to be back."

"But couldn't you just kind of ease him out some way? Maybe get him out of the ring some way. Might buy up his share in the machine, boys. Couldn't you do that?"

"Oh, I don't know, Mr. Kenyon," said Jay. "I don't hardly think we'd ought to push him out of the ring that way. Don't see how we could do it very easy even if we wanted to. He wouldn't sell his share to none of us. Wouldn't sell it now anyways."

"No," Bert Helker said, "I don't see how we could do

that, Mr. Kenyon. Don't think the boys'd want to put him out exactly."

Then Jay's voice came in slow, measured tones. "Fact, there's only one way I see of doin' it. I know it'll be mighty awkward, but the only way I see is for you to stay right around that engine. Just practically run it yourself, Mr. Kenyon. It's the only thing I see we can do."

"Well, you boys ought to know best, of course," said Kenyon. "It will make it kind of bad. I'd ought to be up around the separator most of the time. But if that's the way you boys look at it I suppose it's the only way. You know, I want to be accommodating. That's what I'm here for. I want you boys to be satisfied."

"That's about the only way we can do it, Mr. Kenyon — the way Jay said," said Bert Helker. "Fer he'll be right back here, wantin' to run that engine again, sure as shootin'. You can't stop Burl Teeters, onct he gets somethin' like that in his head. An' he won't forget it either, like you might think after this afternoon. No way under blue heaven a gettin' it out a his head. He's a Teeters, that's all, just as Ambrose says."

There was absolute silence for a while. Then away on the prairie, from the direction of the patch of light at the edge of the sky, there arose a thin, distant calling. The voice seemed very far away, yet it came very clear through the damp dusk.

Ambrose Mull grunted. "There he is now. That's him, I hearn him lots a times like that. It's just like him. That's a Teeters for you, callin' his hogs this time a night when ever' body else has his chorin' done an' forgot about it a couple hours ago." Ambrose snorted and grunted a few times, and then was silent. Kenyon suddenly laughed, very briefly and as though to himself.

The thin distant calling continued, and now it seemed to be growing constantly clearer and stronger as it came out of the dusk. The men sat for a while, silently listening. Moment after moment the calling grew still clearer and louder.

But it was shrill and thin, somehow like an impudent, insistent challenge too distant to be answered at all.

Suddenly Jay Westwright rose impatiently to his feet. The others were getting up now, one after another, Ambrose Mull puffing and wheezing as he did so. Ambrose's puffing was the only sound made by any of the men, except a scuffling of feet and a light rattle of corn cobs here and there on the ground. The faint distant calling came again, more distinct than before. Then Jay Westwright's voice, lifted slightly as if with irritation, seemed to be saying something about a belt. Kenyon made some vague answer about "losing only a day or two." Other voices out in front of the barn were moving away slowly. But above the mutter and mumble of voices the thin calling continued to come, shrill and clear.

In a little while two or three buggies and one Ford were leaving Bert Helker's farmyard. The rattle of wheels and the quick fluttering purr of a small motor soon died away. Then the calling could be heard again, and it seemed even more distinct than it had yet been, a thin distant ringing that pierced the darkness which was settling everywhere over the prairie.

TWO POEMS

By C. E. BURKLUND

A HYMN OF PRAISE

No disaster
Can overpower
The silent master
Within the flower.

Even the worm
At every trial
Shelters a firm
And grave denial.

Every blade
And every leaf
Is strongly made
Beyond belief.

The waste of days
Can never bind
The voice we praise
Within the wind.

The subtle weft
Shall linger ever—
The stars are left
In every river.

The silence cast
In song and sun
Shall outlast
Oblivion.

OURS IS THE EARTH

Now with the sea-hope ended
Let us no more
Linger in the unprofitable utterance
Of the shore.

But go inland, brothers, heart sinewed
With denial
Of the dark-laughing sea's unfathomable
Urge to trial.

Sure are the wingless acres of the earth,
My brothers—
Come, let us go! Ours is the earth — the sea belongs
To others!

CONQUEST

By GLENN WARD DRESBACH

No soil shall ever be soft enough
To make me forget the way my shoulders
Were set to the plow where the ground was rough
And wild hidden boulders.

No matter how rich a field may be
I cannot forget the rugged field
That softened to waving gold for me—
It was something for it to yield!

I remember no other harvest that came
With such abandon, and not till I die
Will wild earth leap to golden flame
So far against the sky.

THE SKETCH BOOK

THE RACE

By ALBERT HALPER

He was in a great hurry because he was afraid he would reach the ice too late. Crossing Lake Street, he made a short cut through the bushes, holding the sharp bare branches to one side to keep himself from getting scratched. His heart was beating very fast. All the way to the lagoon he kept hoping hard that the senior race had not started yet. Now he reached the bridge and heard, very faintly, the German band playing on the platform near the pavilion. He saw a great crowd, about ten deep, standing all around the pond. Still walking fast, sometimes half running, he came up to the edge of the ice and was so excited that he did not care about his hands becoming frozen. Every finger of his mittens had a hole, but he slapped his hands against his thighs, as he had seen the big fellows do, and did not feel the frost.

Now he came up to the crowd. The music was louder, a slow waltz, and Joe worked himself between people until he stood in front where he could see the small American flags stuck in the ice, forming a large oval. The big girls were racing; he was not too late after all. Joe didn't care much for girls; girls were not much good at anything. He was waiting to see Harry Robbins win the big race. All winter long he had carried Harry's skates to Garfield Park and once Harry had let him tie his laces for him.

The report of the pistol, announcing the last lap, made the girls go faster, but Joe wasn't interested. Stamping on the ice in the cold he felt happy because he had reached the lagoon in time to watch Harry win the race. When the big girls were going around the flagged oval for the last time, the band stopped playing and the whole pond seemed very quiet. One girl, trailing the leader, fell, and certain women near Joe felt sorry for her, but Joe was impatient for the

big race to start, and stamped and slapped himself harder than ever.

The crowd cheered the girl who won; then two policemen, on skates, went by, telling the people to keep back, and the announcer spoke through a megaphone, saying the next race would be the senior final for men.

The sun, going behind clouds, made the afternoon seem pale. Several officials were talking near the bandstand and pretty soon a few skaters, dressed in the costumes of their clubs, came from the boathouse and began going slowly, skating in small circles to keep themselves warm. A few wore overcoats and all Joe could see were their legs, but he knew the colors of all the clubs and could tell which ones they belonged to.

During the girls' race a flag had been knocked down and now Joe saw a man drilling a new hole for the stick. The wind, blowing over the frozen pond, was very cold and whirled thin fine snow over the hard ice. Everybody was either stamping or shifting about to keep warm. Most of the men had their collars turned up and hunched their shoulders, while the women wore their mufflers so high that Joe could see only their noses. He himself had had to argue with his mother for a long time before she had given him permission to see the races. It's too cold to stand watching on the ice, his mother had said, and for a while Joe thought he would have to cry in order to get to go.

A few more skaters came from the boathouse, but Joe did not see Harry yet. The crowd began pushing forward until a policeman came up; then it went back a few paces. Joe stood between a large woman in a fur coat and a tall thin man who wore high leather gloves. The woman looked down at Joe.

"Aren't you cold, son?"

"No," said Joe, stamping like a big fellow. "It's not so frosty today."

The woman laughed. "Your nose is red," she said.

The tall man with the big leather gloves smiled down at Joe.

"It's as red as a cherry," he said and asked Joe how old he was.

"I'm eight, but I'm going on nine," said Joe. "My birthday is in May." And he slapped his thighs and stood frowning at the bandstand far over the ice. The tall man and the woman in the fur coat smiled at each other over Joe's head.

"I hope the race starts soon," said Joe, still looking toward the bandstand where the officials were talking together.

The tall man noticed Joe's mittens and the large woman in furs saw the patched elbows of Joe's short overcoat.

"Aren't you cold?" the woman asked again.

"No," said Joe for the second time. "It's not so frosty today." And he stamped very hard upon the ice.

Then he saw Harry Robbins come out of the boathouse and something inside of him began to hammer. He saw Harry's slim legs and yellow skating suit and felt like telling everybody that he knew Harry, that Harry was a good friend of his, and that one day last week he had tied the laces for Harry and Harry had said Joe Gibson was a real fellow. He glanced up at the woman in furs, his eyes misty, but she was watching the skaters warming up, so he decided to keep quiet.

At last the seniors were lined up, those who had worn coats handing them to friends who skated away from the starting point. A few cameramen climbed up on the bandstand and began taking pictures. Then the gun went off, the band struck up a march, and the skaters took off, using short quick strokes until they hit their stride. It was a long race, twelve laps, and the seniors went slowly, bent over and strung out in a close file, their hands behind their backs. They looked like silent hounds picking up a trail. Each stride was long and easy, and the file of twelve skaters, one behind the other, seemed to sway together as the band kept playing. The hammering inside Joe stopped, but he still felt excited. He forgot to slap himself and did not notice that his hands were getting stiff; he only knew that Harry was

in sixth place, the only skater in yellow. The swaying file, going around easily, each senior crossing his legs perfectly at the sharp turns, fascinated him, and for a while his eyes were misty again, but he blinked in order to see better and after the fifth lap he saw that Harry had advanced to fourth place. The file was still close together, the men still skating with hands upon their rumps, still swaying to the music, looking like silent hounds picking up a trail. At the next sharp turn Joe saw Harry cross his legs very quickly and edge into third place. He had watched Harry practice going round a small oval all winter; no one could make turns like Harry; that was Harry's strong point.

At the eighth lap two men dropped out. The file was looser now and going faster. Two skaters in blue were leading and three more wearing blue were behind Harry, who still held third position. All the others wore green or orange costumes. A man near Joe said the fellow in yellow had a fine stride, and Joe felt the hammering inside start up again.

"He may have the stride but he'll be pocketed," another man said. "He hasn't got a chance."

Joe did not understand the second man, he did not know what pocketed meant.

Now the band stopped playing and everything was still. At the sharp turns you could hear the ring of the long blades against the hard ice. By this time the racers were skating with their arms swinging, and no longer looked like hounds picking up a trail. They were determined men who seemed to be running away from something, going in a great hurry. Their strides were shorter now. Two more skaters dropped out, blowing hard as they slowed down, vapor coming from their mouths in long columns. For a while the sun came out, then went behind clouds again, and the whole pond seemed pale and dull, and the strong wind, blowing the fine snow over the ice, was sharper than ever. Joe stood watching. He could not take his eyes away from Harry. All the memories of his walks with Harry came back, and he

had an empty space somewhere in his chest so that his breathing was funny.

At the tenth lap the men were going fast, but their stride was not so graceful any more; their arms were swinging back too far and their legs seemed out of line. The leader kept looking over his shoulder at Harry, who was in second place. Then Joe saw something that made him want to cry out a warning. He opened his mouth, but no words came. The third man in blue, spurting, tried to force Harry too close to the flags while two others in blue worked Harry into a pocket. It was all done skillfully and even Joe, who did not know much about pocketing, could see that Harry was in danger. The leader was drawing away and did not look back any more, and Harry was forced back to third place, the men in blue skating so close he could not free himself. At the last lap the pistol went off and the leader sent himself forward with all his tired strength. The crowd grew very quiet. Joe hoped the leader would stumble at the turn, but he kept looking at Harry, who could not work himself out of the pocket. Harry was the only one from his club to reach the finals, he had no friends to help him, and as Joe saw two other men in blue pass Harry he knew the race was over and he felt like crying. The empty space in his chest was filled up by something very big and heavy.

When the winner crossed the finish line the crowd gave a great cheer, then broke across the ice. Joe turned away, his small face sagging like an old man's. He knew the cameramen were lined up near the band stand, but he did not care to watch them.

Going home he took the short cut through the bushes. One of the branches whipped back and scratched his chin, drawing blood. Joe's hands were numb; he felt very miserable. Crossing open ground he broke through the hard crust of glazed snow and fell forward so that his stiffened fingers felt the jagged edge of crust he had just punctured. He got up slowly, feeling cold and broken-hearted, and when he reached Lake Street the day had almost begun to fade

and he still felt like crying. Putting his hands in his pockets did not warm his fingers.

At the corner, a big man carrying a few packages looked at him. There was snow on Joe's knees, and on his chin the thin trickle of blood had already frozen. The man felt sorry for Joe.

"What's the matter?" he asked and put a hand on Joe's head. "Did someone hit you; did someone knock you down?"

Joe's mouth began quivering; then it opened slowly and he could not see the big man very well because his eyes were full of tears.

"A big fellow hit me," said Joe. "He knocked me down and rubbed snow all over me. He wasn't my size, he was bigger than me."

Now the man was very sorry for him. Joe began to cry and his nose started running in the cold. The big man gave Joe a handkerchief, but Joe could not stop crying, and after he was questioned about the appearance of the fellow who had hit him, the man said he would tell a policeman.

"He was a big fellow," Joe said and blew his nose hard. "He was a lot bigger than me."

The man looked sympathetic and said he would tell a policeman; then he patted Joe's head again, smiled down at him and began walking away.

Joe ran all the way home, sobbing hard and thinking of the big warm stove in the kitchen. By the time he reached Fulton Street, a thin fine snow was falling and the street lamps came on.

He hurried through the passageway, but before going up the back stairs he blew his nose twice in the man's handkerchief and brushed his knees, because he knew that if his mother saw him crying he would not be allowed to watch any more races on cold days.

VACATION

By MILDRED LEW MERRYMAN

It was cooler on his back porch. Each year at the beginning of the hot weather, he dragged out his rickety cot and slept there. This morning when he woke he saw it had rained.

Beyond the screen, webs in the moon vine glistened. Wet leaves caught the sunbeams, shot them back. Curiously upright, a humming bird hung in the air to dip its long beak into a honeysuckle blossom, wings beating so fast they seemed still. Darting, jerking, halting, it moved with a sharp zizz, zizz. The buzzing came to him dimly. A number of sounds escaped him now; he did not realize how many.

Usually during these humid summer months, his limbs held a heaviness on rising; but this morning his body felt buoyant, his mind alert. There must be a reason — what was it? Then he remembered.

Tomorrow his vacation began. He would have a week — a whole week to spend in his garden, pruning, weeding, replanting.

A real vacation at last!

He sat up in bed and reached for his work clothes on the foot of the cot. Piece by piece he drew them on, his fingers fumbling. If he hurried, after breakfast he would have an hour to plan.

In the kitchen he picked up a pail and started toward the pump. As he trudged along the pathway, overalls bagging at the knees, he looked like some old German gnome lost from a fairy tale. With every dip of the pump handle his body bobbed stiffly up and down.

A bench on the porch held a basin. He splattered it half-full and sloshed his face and neck in the cool well-water.

There were new-laid eggs in the hen house; he gathered several and chuckled.

Back in the kitchen he warmed up yesterday's coffee. While the eggs were frying he cut a slice of bread and got

out a can of cream. He ate slowly, enjoying the food, staring through the window meanwhile at his garden.

True, he would have liked fresh cream for his coffee, but good fresh cream cost money.

Although he had only himself to think of now, living grew no cheaper.

Sometimes when he came home tired of evenings, he missed the sound of supper sizzling in the kitchen, missed the old woman with her tireless, scolding tongue.

Mornings he was always glad she was not there. He was glad to be free of her tyranny. Women were all such bosses!

He finished breakfast, put bread and cheese into his lunch box and stacked the dishes in the sink beside a pile of others.

"Tomorrow," he thought, "inside — outside, I clean!"

He filled his pipe and lit it, holding it firmly between brown snags of teeth. Then he picked up his broad straw hat and went into the garden.

Tch! Tch! Tch! Such a hodgepodge! Everything jumbled higglety-pigglety — no order, no system at all!

Anyone would suppose he didn't know what a garden ought to look like, he, Franz, who had spent his life in gardens. If only he could get more time to plan and arrange! Now whenever anyone gave him a bulb or a cutting, he stuck it quickly in the earth to save it and there it stayed. But one day he would change all that; he would have neat round beds and square beds with rows of whitewashed stones to mark the paths.

Deliberately he moved about, peering into blossoms, feeling of petals and stems. Coarse grass choked the roots of the dahlias; aphids threatened the Cherokees on the fence.

Ach, so much to do! He could scarcely wait to begin.

In a trash pile, where last year he had buried garbage, some seeds had taken root. Two great striped watermelons lay sprawling there, one already ripe. It was droll how everything flourished for him. Sometimes he had to laugh at his luck. The Negroes told him he had a "growin' hand".

At first he had hated this hot white southern country — the savage gush of sun, the blinding rains, the lavishness of

its shallow fevered growth. Such verdure was almost grotesque. Why, even a rose stuck in the sand, if covered with a glass would sprout and grow. The indecency of it — a rose!

All his life he had been used to toiling harder for much less. In his florist's shop on the hem of a northern city, he had learned to wait with patience for the guttering of dingy snows in corners, the slow sweet drawing on of paler springs. But now he had come to love the south, his cottage, his bit of garden. It is well to have growth come quickly when one is old.

From his pocket he pulled out a silver watch. Seven! Time to be going! Reluctantly he picked up his lunch box from the step and took the track through the scrub oak that led to the village.

"Ski-wump! Ski-wump!" said his feet in the slushy sand. The lid of his lunch box jingled. Two buzzards sat humped in a tall dead pine staring at nothing. Across the path in front of him a mother quail paraded her young ones, ten puffs of tremulous fuzz walking sedately in a row. The trail grew wider, became a road bordered by bungalows with mangy lawns. On the porch of one a woman was lazily sweeping. For others as well as himself, the day had begun.

Each morning as he turned in at the Madame's gate he experienced a moment of panic lest something had happened to her. The Madame was old — well along in the sixties he guessed, but he couldn't be sure. All his future welfare lay in her keeping. She liked his work and paid him liberally. No one else in the village could afford a gardener. If she were to die — whenever he thought about it his pulse gave a skip. Once she had had a sort of spell. The maid had come hurrying toward him, her face as white as her apron. He had had to drop his rake and run quick, quick for the doctor. In the doctor's office after he had delivered his message he had turned suddenly faint and sick. Hard as he had run for the Madame, he had run harder for himself.

True, she wasn't always easy to work for; now and then

she got notions like all her sex, fussed about his health, what he ate and how he lived. One time she had bought him an umbrella, a big brown cotton thing like a giant mushroom. She made him carry it too, whenever it rained. An umbrella! Such a nonsense! But that was women — always wanting to boss.

Today as he entered the grounds he felt prouder than ever of the spacious lawn, the carefully clustered shrubbery, the shipshape beds of flowers.

During the night new weeds had come pushing up through the grass. Mornings when the soil was wet, there was nothing he liked better than pulling weeds. Yet it gave him a guilty feeling, too. They looked so pathetic heaped in the basket with their delicate roots of pink and gray and pearl. After all, when you stopped to think about it, weeds were nothing more than the brave beginnings of flowers. Here was one, for example, with a tiny purple blossom like a fairy four o'clock.

Back and forth he trudged with his knife and basket, digging now here, now there, till all the garden was crisscrossed with patient unseen tracks. It was queer about tracks, he thought. Feet on grass, keels in water, wings in air passed and made no mark. And a good thing, too! If every creature left its trace what a scuffed world this would be.

High in the oleanders there were dead branches needing to be clipped. From the garage he brought a ladder and climbed it gingerly. Nowadays, standing on a height made him dizzy, hung a mist before his eyes. He mounted, twitched out the shrivelled leaves and clambered down.

"There," he thought; "that's over!"

The sun was hot and beating. He scanned the horizon for a cloud and doggedly shook his head. Well — no matter! There was work among the rose vines in the shade. Queer how fast the sun rolled when the work was work you loved. Already it was noon.

Lunch box in hand he lifted the slanting cellar door and went down the gray stone steps. Stirred by his passing, mosquitoes rose from the damp to whirl and buzz. The

basement was cold and dim. After the bright sunshine, at first he could see nothing; then gradually he made out his chair, a mammoth mouldy leather chair with sagging springs. He sank down with a grunt of relief and opened his lunch box. It was pleasant to sit there in the quiet, nibbling, resting his bones.

A mouse crept out from behind a board, spied him and scurried back. Black turpentine bugs crawled over the woodpile, waving their feelers. They had snug dark homes in the logs beneath the bark. Spiders hung a tattered lace at the narrow windows. He liked spiders; they had grit. Knock away their webs today and back they came tomorrow, jaunty as you please. He had been a gardener too long not to know that small things worked with a purpose definite as his. Under the sun's wide wheel each living creature travelled a wheel of its own. No two were ever quite alike or ever would be. It was maddening to think of — those trillions and trillions of wheels.

Take him and his old woman: They had eaten, worked, slept side by side for thirty years, but each from the first to last had trod a separate cycle. The little they knew of one another's thought was as nothing compared to that which must lie forever unrevealed.

He shrugged and reached for his pipe. As he sucked on it the stem made a gurgling sound.

Tonight was pay night. This year his vacation money would go for nicotine, bordeaux mixture, and bone meal. Tomorrow he would send away an order, written in a slow beautiful German hand.

Somewhere in the house above, a clock chimed one. It was time to get back to work. He clumped up the stairs and went blinking into the sun. With his spade he began to reshape the rose bed. Himself he liked nice square corners, straight lines, but the madame was queer. Always she must have curves — great sweeping curves.

"Do it thus and thus," she would tell him. "Put the trowel in *so* and pull it out *so*!" Such things to him who'd been a gardener for forty years!

Well — no matter! Madame's garden was her own and women were always flighty. The steel spade glittered in the sunlight. Time after time he placed it, set his foot on the top and pushed. Sweat rolled from his face; he could feel his shirt in the back sticking fast to his body.

Against the shell of his thought a sound broke dimly. He looked up, saw nothing and humped again to his spade. The sound was repeated. Bewildered he gazed to right and left, darting his glance this way and that. When he turned at last, the Madame was behind him smiling her crisp thin smile. Upright and slim she stood waiting, a delicate little old lady worn brittle by the years. Her voice came clearly now. Once he could watch her lips he could understand.

"Franz," she said, "I've been thinking — you need a vacation."

He grinned, showing his stumps of teeth. When he spoke his words were oddly punctuated, not so much because he was a foreigner but because he was deaf and rarely talked.

"Yes-um," he said, "yes-um — tomorrow I take!"

She shook her head with precision. "You don't understand me, Franz. I mean you must have a *real* vacation — a change. A change is of the utmost benefit to everyone. We need new sights, new sounds, new ideas. I will give you ten dollars extra for your expenses, but you must go away — take a whole week away."

He grinned. A slyness crept into his manner; his words made a swinging rhythm. "T'ank you ma'am," he said, "but I t'ink — I yust stay home — and feex — my garden oop."

She was a very erect old lady; now she stood straighter still.

"No, Franz," she said; "that won't do — it won't do at all! You must go to the city to spend your week. I've positively made up my mind."

He was beginning to be worried, but he would not admit it yet. He smiled a bit whimsically.

"What would I do — in the city?" he asked.

She had her answer ready. "You could visit the green-

house, couldn't you? You could look in the florist windows and go to the movies — such things! There's plenty you could do."

Seeing the lines at the corners of her mouth draw down and deepen, suddenly he knew she meant it — knew he must go. His body sagged. Gradually like a gnome about to disappear he seemed to shrink deeper and deeper into his clothes, till he was hardly more than a hat, a shirt, and a pair of overalls.

"Yes-um," he said. "Yes-um!"

"Good!" she replied, and handed him some bills.

He took them and wadded them into his pocket. Drearily he returned to the garage to put away his tools. For a long while he stood puttering over them, feeling numb and miserable.

As he took the path toward home the sun was dipping. Above the trail the dragon flies wheeled without sound.

"Ach, God — women! Such fools!"

All his life a man was no more than a slave. He made himself somewhere a little heaven; he told himself, "I am free; at last I am free!" But even as he spoke he knew he was lying.

At home he sat down on the door step, rested his elbows on his knees, his chin in his hands. When at last he rose to go in, it was dark.

He lit the lamp and carried it to the closet. From the corner he pulled out an old straw suitcase, his Sunday shoes. The soles of his shoes were green with dusty mildew. In the bureau he groped for a shirt and a couple of collars. All the while he made preparations he kept mumbling to himself.

Next morning he got up early and took the bus.

TASKER'S FARM

By LOREN C. EISELEY

The blowing of the wet brown leaf
Along forsaken eaves,
The dropping of the blackened fruit,
The polar star that weaves

Its cold blue circle nearer now
Above the empty field,
Betray the ruin, not the peace
Upon them, that has healed

The quarrel grown too deep for words.
This slowly settling farm
That leans into a shifting wind
Knew her when young and warm

She came here as a bride, before
He had grown penny-wise
And careful in the way of men
Who think that summer skies

Stand always in the brain's locked space,
Imperishable and sure.
She knew it was not so: she knew
Life is expenditure

And hammer of the golden pulse,
And sowing of the breath.
From the first birth pang to the last
We spend against the death

Sure to inherit all we hoard.
But her cold, metal man
Compressed life to the shape of coins,
And hid them in a can

Concealed beneath a cellar stone
To gather dust, although
The autumns now were skipping past—
And after autumn — snow.

Some cool gay ruffian of the ridge
Once stopped before the door . . .
He came again. She improvised
Her pretties from her store

Of bridal clothes, and, mending rags
And tatters of her life,
She fled, along the upland thorn,
Half dreaming blood and strife

And rifles out to have her back
Into the hollows green.
She lusted for the thrill of hoofs,
The clamorous dark scene

When he came up to claim his wife,
Shaken from out the clutch
Of dusty garnering and gain,
And hungry for the touch

Of her white beauty once again . . .
The lines along her throat
Tightened . . . That moment in the room
He read her futile note,

Unmoving, and forgot her face
Until he turned — and then
He saw the cellar door and shook.
He looked . . . He breathed again,

And pondered on tomorrow's work.
The night she shivered in
Beside a stranger, did not break
His sleep — as cool and thin

As ice upon a roadside pool.
Along the upland, frost
Crept with its silver, circling hands.
The fugitives were lost.

In some weird drift of falling leaves
They vanished. Men will tell
Her husband prospered certain years
And then disaster fell.

The acreage that he had won
Turned sterile and outworn.
From too-long wringing of the soil
Its yield relapsed to thorn.

The lover and wife lie still . . .
If any linger here
It is his ghost, a trifle vague
But tremulous with fear

Of rabbits girdling orchard trees
That cost a sum in town,
Or estimating the lost yield
Of fields long trampled down.

He triumphs in that glittering cold.
This winter-tortured land
Will bear the marks of penury
A century from his hand.

POEMS

By G. J. NEUMANN

HEAVEN'S HIRE

He that builds
With the rainbow,
What shall he have
When the sun is low?

When the bat flies
And the beetle booms,
For whom do the stars
Weave at their looms?

THE FEAST OF SOULS

Stored in a single petal is
Honey and wine for centuries.

Hoary the world is: Heaven still
Works the morning miracle,

If but the heart of youth it find
Married to the poet's mind.

Lay the petal in the wind's cold bed—
Nine and a thousand souls are fed.

LINE OF BEAUTY

From leap to lighting,
What agile arcs the robin drew!
Fain is my plighting:

In fields Elysian,
If there be schools, here is my true
Geometrician.

DEFEAT

Not seven strong men
Can draw this nail
Out of my mind—
That is colder than hail.

And hotter than passion
And thinner than a hair
And all invisible
As the night air.

Not seven strong men—
Unless one be
Death, and he'll do it
Nonchalantly—

Even as the sun
(Drive pile in pool)
Nods to the waters
And needs no tool.

THERE IS A DOOR

By RIRHARD WARNER BORST

There is a door that always has stood open,
Awaiting me with welcome, though all others
May hold unmoved against my beating hands.

Somewhere it waits, upon a secret landing,
In life's tall mansion, where behind an arras,
Or past a shadowy staircase, I shall find it.

Unknowing what has chanced, I shall pass through,
To reach the place in my brief pilgrimage
That I have least endeavored to attain.

Unwitting, I shall cross its quiet threshold,
Nor pause to look at what I leave behind;
And the door will close as silently and gently

As snow falls in November, while the lock,
Soundless as caverned air, will gently slip
Into its socket, never to be withdrawn.

I'VE BEEN READING —

By JOHN T. FREDERICK

TWO KINDS OF ROMANCE —

Isabel Paterson's *The Road of the Gods* (Liveright, \$2.50) is a very good example of something rather rare in our literary generation — a colorful, fast-moving romance of a primitive and pagan community in northern Europe just before the coming of the Roman legions. The book is well designed and well written. The writer's chief care has gone into the realization of details of background, and there are many pictures of interiors, and of incidents of the domestic life and the religious ceremonies of the tribe, which remain vividly in the reader's mind. Mrs. Paterson's work does not approach, on the one hand, the authentic human experience of the mediaeval novels of Sigrid Undset; nor does she by any means attain, on the other hand, the poetic quality of the more closely comparable romances of Wil-

liam Morris. But *The Road of the Gods* is a very pleasant and workmanlike example of what might be called fiction as decoration.

Romance of a highly different quality appears in *Orphans of Eternity* (Louis Carrier, \$2.50), by Carl Heinrich. Here we have the fiction of ideas, with very good entertainment as well. There is something rather splendidly audacious in Heinrich's conception of Satan dispossessed and wandering the universe, and he brings great gusto and vitality to the elaboration of the idea. I have the feeling that the book is somewhat uneven, and loosely put together. Excellent descriptive passages and bits of most entertaining and stimulating conversation are spaced by other passages which seem vague and dull in comparison. But the book as a whole is one of very genuine originality, and I am eager to see what else its writer may do. His vocation as entomologist appears in one of the most impressive passages of this book — a glimpse of life among the caterpillars; and the book is also quite evidently the work of a musician. The reader who likes satire which is alert, unsparing, and entertaining should not miss *Orphan of Eternity*, and will be likely, if he reads it, to watch for the next appearance of the name of Carl Heinrich.

AND TWO KINDS OF REALISM

The great difference which may exist in novels roughly classified as realistic is admirably illustrated in Elisabeth Wilkins Thomas's *Ella* (Viking, \$2.50) and Sarah Atherton's *Blow, Whistles, Blow!* (Brewster and Warren, \$2.50). The first is an extremely simple and uneventful story of the school life of an American girl in a family of some degree of wealth and social position, and of the beginning of her independent career. The story has significant psychological implications, but these are not at all overstressed. It consists of a series of incidents, most of them lacking in obvious drama, but each presented with a really exquisite sense for details and for language. The result for the reader is a series of experiences richly and minutely realized, quite completely and satisfyingly genuine. I cannot feel sure that *Ella* heralds a great talent, for it seems to me that the book does not quite rise to the emotional demands of the more important incidents. But it is certainly a piece of most admirable and delicate writing, and it affords authentic if somewhat slender experience.

Widely different is Miss Atherton's *Blow, Whistles, Blow!* Here we have an abundance of plot and of action, many characters, striking settings. Sophie Fashung, the daughter of an anthracite miner in the Pennsylvania colliery town of Coldspring, is the central character, and the story leads her through a mine disaster, a strike, a life as mill-worker and student nurse, and through disappointment in the man she loves to the discovery of a love more worthy of her exceptional personality. The book holds interest through its plot, and through the rather effective writing of certain passages which give general impressions of collieries and mills and of the countryside, and of some bits of dramatic conversation. But the book as a whole

gives the impression of artificiality — not of conscious insincerity, but of the unreal realism which proceeds from a limited emotional participation on the part of the writer in the experience which he is attempting to present. It is as though the writer had said, "Here is fine material for a realistic novel. Someone ought to use it." Sophie and her sister, her father, her friends never become wholly real, the life they live is never actually tasted by the reader. Miss Atherton is hampered by a too-rigid exclusion of unpleasant details, and by the conventional pattern of her book as a whole. But even apart from these limitations her work remains definitely that of an observer, not too sensitive or intuitive — never that of a participant.

HENRY WILLIAMSON AGAIN

I am sorry to confess myself a little disappointed in Henry Williamson's *Dandelion Days* (Dutton, \$2.50). This book stands second in the series of four novels presenting the life of William Madison, but is third in publication in this country, having been preceded by *The Beautiful Years* and *The Pathway*. *Dandelion Days* is the record of the school years of the boy Willie — his relation to other boys and to his teachers, the beginning of his interest in girls, and always his profound and intense relationship to nature. In its place in the series I have no doubt *Dandelion Days* would seem right in treatment and proportion. But standing alone its presentation of the school life seems somewhat overly detailed, and less individual than other parts of Williamson's work. It has not quite the finish and poignancy of *The Beautiful Years*, nor the power of *The Pathway*. Yet it has truth, intensity, sensitiveness, beauty in rich measure, and strengthens my belief that Williamson is one of the finest of living writers.

This belief is supported, also, by a reading of Williamson's *The Wet Flanders Plain* (Dutton, \$2.00). This is a collection of informal sketches and impressions drawn from the author's visits, ten years after, to the places along the western front which he had known during the war. It is a book of real beauty and of profound emotion — a truly distinctive war book, and a work of art.

CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM

The Viking Press is doing a fine thing in making available for American readers, in worthy editions, the work of R. B. Cunningham-Graham. I first heard of this man in the pages of Charles J. Finger's fine magazine, *All's Well*, where I read Finger's characteristically generous and vigorous praise of his friend, and some selected tales by Cunningham-Graham, of remarkable simplicity and power. Hence I was prepared to welcome the volume of *Thirty Tales and Sketches*, selected by Edward Garnett (Viking, \$3.00), which was published a year or so ago, and the more recent *Mogreb-el-Acksa* (Viking, \$3.00), a narrative of a journey in Morocco. The work of Cunningham-Graham is most closely akin to that of W. H. Hudson, at least to the extent that lovers of Hudson (of whom I

am happy to be one) are likely to enjoy Cunningham Graham. He does not attain, in anything of his which I have read, the beauty of Hudson's prose; but he has Hudson's unfailing recognition of the memorable and significant elements in any scene or experiences, and he has an infinitely varied wealth of experience on which to draw. His work is characterized also by a peculiarly keen and devastating vein of satire — now playful, now harsh and bitter. The brilliant narrative of *Mogreb-el-Acksa* — the story of an attempt to reach the forbidden city of Tarudant, in the Atlas Mountains — is full of penetrating comparisons between the life of Arab and Berber on the one hand and of Englishmen on the other, not often to the advantage of the English. These are remarkable books; perhaps not many readers will like them, but those who do will like them exceedingly well.

PORTRAIT OF A PERSONALITY

Margaret Anderson's *My Thirty Years' War* (Covici, Friede, \$4.00) is interesting as a history of a literary epoch and of one of the most important and interesting magazines of that epoch, *The Little Review*. Its pages are crowded with vivid impressions of the men and women whom Margaret Anderson met and dealt with during her editorship, and with letters and other documents related to them. The literary historian will do well to check matters of detail — Miss Anderson says frankly that she is not interested in dates. But there can be no denying the value of many of these contemporary portraits.

What gives the book its greatest interest, however, is the character of Margaret Anderson herself. She writes with extraordinary frankness, without awkwardness or pettiness, and with charm. The result is an almost ideal autobiography. Miss Anderson has had good training for such writing, for *The Little Review* was at all times personal and informal, and contained much of that real conversation which Miss Anderson values above most things in life and which is the basis of her method in this book. I have read no contemporary autobiography in the field of letters which seemed to me so rich in materials, and so fascinating in its revelation of the writer, as *My Thirty Years' War*.

TWO CONTEMPORARY GERMAN CRITICS

Very interesting innovations in literary criticism are represented by two recent volumes translated from the German, Stefan Zweig's *Three Masters* (Viking, \$3.00) and Paul Wiegler's *Genius in Love and Death* (A. and C. Boni, \$2.50). *Three Masters* is a part of a long series of biographical and critical studies of the builders of civilization which Stefan Zweig has undertaken. Two additional volumes have appeared in Germany and one in this country. The present essays deal with the vast and somewhat kindred talents of Balzac, Dickens, and Dostoievski. They discard the formal and chronological method conventional in such studies, but they are far from the shallow and inadequate "fictionized" treatment which is

becoming altogether too common in America. Each essay attempts to proceed to the central meaning, the essential significance, of the man and his work — to illuminate the whole body of his work by a right understanding of his purpose and motives, his method, and his effectiveness. The results are essays at once absorbing and thoughtful — full of meaning for the student of literature and for the general reader. I shall try to follow the successive volumes of the series.

Paul Wiegler's vignettes are bound together by the incidents presented. In the lives of Balzac, Turgenev, Tolstoi, Verlaine, Poe, Oscar Wilde, and the rest of his twenty-one subjects the author has chosen brief periods of crisis; in most, just preceding death; in many, when the lines of love and death crossed. These brief periods he has presented with reserve, with economy of detail, but with extraordinary vitality. The book makes absorbing reading, and some of the sketches are masterly. That of Rossetti is one of the least satisfactory, that of Turgenev one of the best. Highly similar essays are to be found in some of Huneker's volumes — with greater gusto, but less delicacy and less breadth of sympathy. I do not know where else to find comparable work.

UNAMUNO AS STORY-TELLER

The name of Miguel de Unamuno is manifestly one to be reckoned with, in any study of contemporary Spain. But his *Three Exemplary Novels* (A. and C. Boni, \$2.50) disappointed me. I found the Prologue, a discussion of literary problems and theories, rather banal, and without interest except for the writer's criticism of the popular fiction of Spain; and the first two stories, though unusual in theme and highly dramatic, failed to make any authentic contact with my emotions. The third "exemplum," that of a self-made, "hard" man broken by love and death, is much more impressive — a story not likely to be forgotten. Perhaps the translation robs Unamuno's fiction of its charm. Perhaps it is just that I am not at the moment in sympathy with the spare, almost mechanical treatment and the exotic material.

FROM THE PUEBLOS

Indian Stories from the Pueblos (Lippincott, \$3.50), by Frank G. Applegate, is an individual and delightful book. It is made up, as the title indicates, of stories drawn from the life of the Indians of the Southwest. Some are illustrative of the relations of Indians and white men, some present the modern life of the Indians within their own communities, and a few are selected from the Indians' tribal literature — stories dealing with their own history and the origin of their customs. These stories are told with a very high degree of literary skill. Their simplicity and dignity leave nothing to be desired. They are filled with sympathy and understanding, rendered authentic by the author's long and intimate association with the people of the pueblos. And the stories themselves are delightful —

richly varied, colorful, absorbing. The publishers have given the stories a fitting setting in what is a very attractive piece of book-making indeed, with its map end-papers and its numerous colored reproductions of beautiful Indian paintings. All in all, this is a book which I recommend with enthusiasm.

BIOGRAPHICAL

J. R. DUMONT is a young New York writer, who is at present engaged in the foreign advertising business. This is his first story to be published.

FREDERIC COVER lives at Altoona, Pennsylvania.

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GLENN WARD DRESBACH, of Chicago, is well known to readers of *THE MIDLAND*.

ALBERT HALPER, who has contributed to an earlier issue of *THE MIDLAND*, is at present in New York City.

MILDRED PLEW MERRYMAN, also already known to our readers, sends this story from Florida.

RICHARD WARNER BORST, of Fullerton, California, has been a contributor to *THE MIDLAND* since its early volumes.

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